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SPORTS

Winchester girls soccer drops heartbreaker to host Needham in Sweet 16 game

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR

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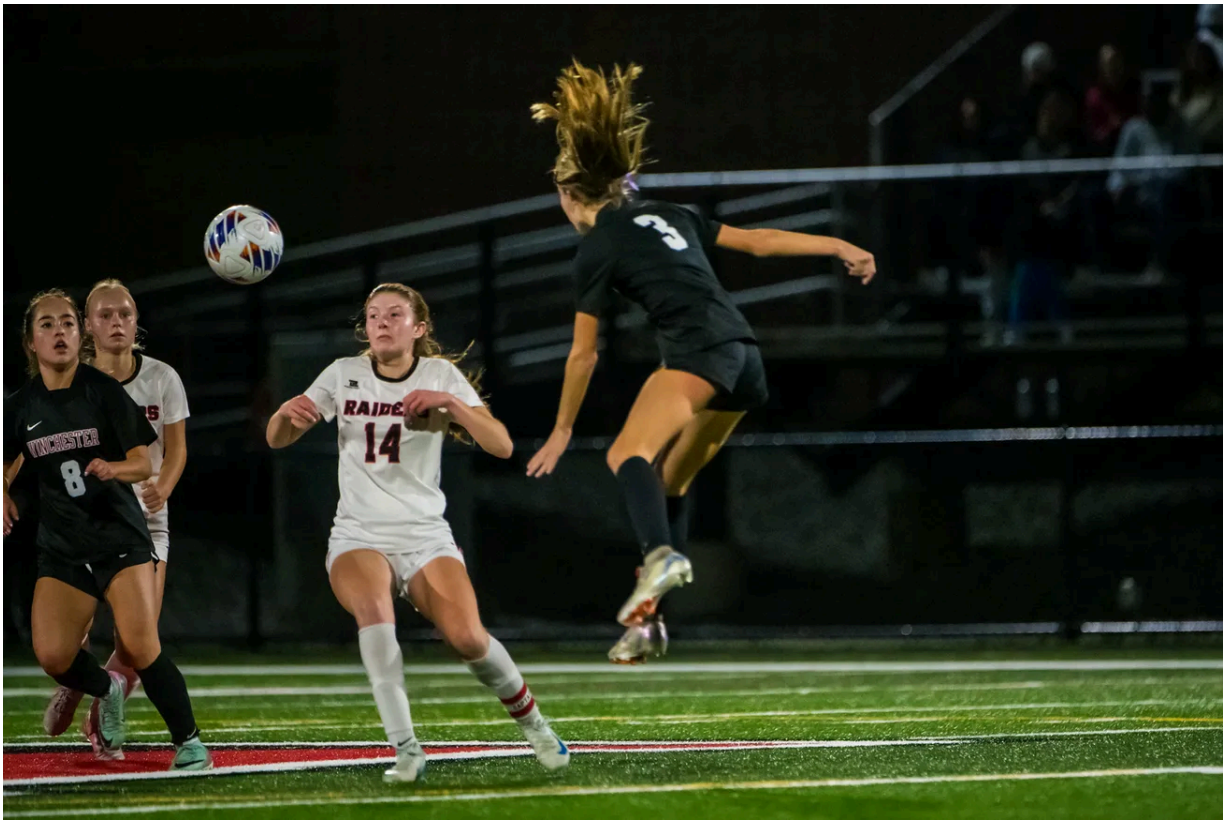

Winchester High girls soccer sophomore defender Sara Stewart (3) heads the ball up field during a game against Wellesley late last month. COURTESY PHOTO

Inevitably, only one team can win the state championship in each of five girls soccer divisions. But that doesn't diminish the accomplis

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of the other postseason participants. They earned the right to be there in the power rankings system that has measured high school teams in all sports for the last three years.

In Division 1 this year, a total of 36 squads qualified for the playoffs, including the Winchester Red & Black, who were the 12th seed after compiling a 14-1-3 regular season record. They then shutout Westford Academy (10-6-1, 21st seed) in the Round of 32, 2-0 to begin the postseason.

But last Saturday night (Nov. 9), the Winchester girls lost a heartbreaker to host Needham (15-4-1, fifth seed) in the Sweet 16, 2-1.

Playoff soccer games decided by one goal are the norm. The outcome could go either way, but for the proverbial bounce of the ball.

Michelle Ross, the Winchester first-year coach, can't believe the season is over. It was a fun ride that could have gone on for a few more days.

"The team accomplished far more than I expected after losing so many (seniors) last year, plus (coach) Rick Emanuel, who had been with the program for 13 years," Ross said after the Needham game. "I strongly believe that this team was able to accomplish so much this fall thanks in large part to the support from the parents, the town and the soccer program in general (from youth to high school)."

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Winchester High girls soccer senior captain Ellie Kiernan (9) looks to beat her Wellesley counterpart to the ball during a game late last month. COURTESY PHOTO

Ross credits field hockey coach Michelle White, volleyball coach John Fleming and Athletic Director Marc Arria for serving as sounding boards throughout her first season as a varsity coach. She leaned on them for advice, and they were right there to guide her through the process.

In last Saturday night's hard-fought playoff showdown, the Red & Black put up a valiant fight, but ultimately fell to the Needham Rockets by the narrowest of margins.

Despite relentless pressure, the visitors couldn't overcome Needham's early two-goal lead. But they still exited the tournament with heads held high and a season full of remarkable achievements behind them.

Winchester was the dominant team for the first 15 minutes of the game, pinning the Rockets in their own end, while firing off several quality shots. Just three minutes into the game, senior captain Lila Savage laun

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powerful strike from 30 yards out, only to be denied by Needham keeper Natalia Ly.

Five minutes later, Savage tested Ly once more, but the keeper was equal to the task again. Despite a promising start, the Winchester girls were unable to capitalize.

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Needham broke the deadlock with just over 18 minutes left in the first half, when sophomore Isabelle Marino sent a pinpoint corner to junior Hannah Levine, who headed home the game's first score. Nine minutes later and still in the first half, Sydney Kalaw doubled Needham's lead.

"I think the disappointment of not scoring first after dominating early was tough on the team," said Ross. "But the girls came out for the second half with renewed urgency, pressing the Needham defense once again with grit and determination."

Their efforts finally paid off 13 minutes into the second half, when Savage played a perfectly timed through ball to senior captain Lucca Ventura, who sent a precise shot to the top far corner of the net to trim the deficit in half.

The Red & Black kept the pressure on, outshooting Needham in the second half, 11-4, but were frustrated by the crossbar and two other near misses. Despite out-possessing and outplaying the Rockets, Winchester couldn't find the final touch to secure a tie to force overtime.

"The Needham midfielders were impressive," said Ross. "They (smoothly) settled balls out of the air and also headed them effectively, whil
their bodies well to shield off opponents. They are a well-discipli

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and in this game that was the difference. They were clinical in finishing plays.

“While they’re disappointed with the result, the girls should still hold their heads high,” added Ross. “They showed grit and passion out there, proving that they belong on this stage.”

Winchester came into the season as underdogs, and emerged as Middlesex League champions.

“Our season was a testament to teamwork, proving that when a group of determined athletes plays with unity and heart, they can accomplish more than anyone expected,” said Ross.

After losing eight seniors last year to graduation, including three EMass All-Stars and an All-New England goalkeeper, the Red & Black faced the additional challenge of adjusting to new leadership after longtime coach Rick Emanuel retired.

But the girls rallied around those losses to play like a cohesive unit. Their success came from a powerful combination of teamwork, resilience and determination, according to Ross.

This season was also one for the record books. The team went undefeated in the Middlesex League, and scored an impressive 52 goals, while allowing just seven. The Winchester defense helped record an unbelievable 15 shutouts.

“As I reflect on this memorable season, we will take pride in adding to the program’s legacy by embodying a spirit of unity and excellence that will inspire future teams for years to come,” said Ross.

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Winchester boys basketball heads to Bridgewater-Raynham for Sweet 16 game after beating Lexington in postseason opener

It was the third meeting this year between Middlesex League boys basketball rivals Lexington (16-5, 11th seed) and Winchester (17-4, 22nd seed). They split the first two during the regular season, thus making this Round of 32 postseason matchup the impromptu rubber game of this year's series, with the

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Winchester wrestling enjoys Top 10 finish at state divisional meet; senior captains move on to All-States

After the Winchester High qualified wrestlers competed hard over two days last weekend (Feb. 20, 21) in the State Division 1 Meet at North Andover High School, Mother Nature gave them a break to rest and recuperate with Monday's blizzard that resulted in two days off from school. There

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Winchester boys hockey advances to the Sweet 16 after beating Wachusett in the tournament opener

The Winchester High boys hockey team (12-9-2), the 17th seed, edged the 16th-seeded Wachusett Regional Mountaineers (18-2-1), 5-4 in a Round of 32 Division 1 state tournament game at Westborough's Northstar Ice Arena on Feb. 25. The Red & Black will now take on top seed Catholic Memorial (18-2-1)

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With postseason starting Friday night, WHS boys hoop seniors English, Sarpong, Burbine join Middlesex League elite

The Winchester High boys basketball team, the 22nd seed, will take on Middlesex League rival Lexington, the 11th seed, to begin the Division 1 state tournament in the Round of 32 on Friday night, Feb. 27, starting at 6 p.m. These teams are so evenly matched, beginning with the

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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